

Why Kansas City Needs Low Barrier, Emergency Shelter



Addendum to 6/29/2022 presentation on
Ordinance 220201 - Unhoused Solutions

Overview

Emergency shelter and other crisis housing (shelters, interim housing, motel vouchers) play a critical role in our system's response to homelessness.

Emergency shelters will always be necessary as there will always be people dislodged from housing who will need temporary accommodation.

Overview

If every person regardless of circumstance needs a bed to sleep in, then every community needs some form of **low-barrier shelter**, especially when people are living in encampments, on the street or other places not meant for human habitation.

The lack of low-barrier emergency shelter leads individuals to create or seek “shelter” in encampments, which promote trafficking, public health concerns, violence, costly clean up efforts, and more.

Eliminating encampments is critical to ending homelessness.

“High Barrier Shelters” accommodate some, not all

High Barrier Shelters

- operate as “enforcement first” programs that center “policy over person”
- prioritize the highest functioning (least vulnerable)
- are not part of the “continuum of care”
- are not required to report data
- do not permit those who have SPMI
- exclude individuals with SUD

“High Barriers” lead to individuals seeking shelter outside

- admission being dependent on chapel or class attendance
- mandatory program participation
- strict curfews (without exception)
- rigid rules and requirements class attendance
- Sexual identity/presenting gender
- background & credit checks
- income requirements and verification
- criminal records
- sobriety (breathalyzers and drug screens)
- forced labor participation
- mental illness
- strict curfews (without exception)

Population

- 61% of chronically homeless individuals have experienced **lifetime mental health problems**
 - Over 80% have experienced **lifetime alcohol and/or drug problems**
 - 40% of *transition aged* youth (16-24) identify as LGBTQ
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The current high barrier shelter system leaves a portion of the population to seek shelter outside.

Low Barrier shelter fills that gap.

Low Barrier Doesn't Mean No Rules.

LOW BARRIER Shelter

- Focuses on respect in behaviour, not punishment for actions
- Understands trauma, and utilizes a trauma-informed approach
- Uses restrictions and barring sparingly, and connects people to alternative resources
- Does not impose values and beliefs on residents
- Serves and accepts people without judgment
- Treats belongings respectfully
- Encourages access to basic needs like hygiene with dignity
- Integrates housing and community
- Makes decisions in collaboration with residents
- Actively engages with guests, encourages housing and promotes hope

If Kansas City had a low barrier, emergency shelter, encampments and other outside shelters could be eliminated.